Letter from Taizé

Living the Council of Youth

GRATUITE THEOLOGIE CATHOLIQUE UNION 1962

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O God, the Father of everybody : you ask all f us to bring love where the poor are humiliated, oy where the Church is downcast and reconcilia- ion where people are divided — the father with is son, the mother with her daughter, the husband vith his wife, the believer with whoever cannot elieve, the christian with his unwanted fellow hristian. You open this way for us, so that the vounded body of Jesus Christ, your Church, be eaven of communion for the poor of the earth, nd in the whole human family.

Together at Taizé August 16-17, 1976,
Mother Teresa of Calcutta
and Brother Roger of Taizé
wrote the above prayer.

The meetings at Taizé

During the entire summer at Taizé, week after week thousands of young people from all over Europe and from many other parts of the world took part in the international meetings. Some decided to spend a week in silence ; others chose one of the many different groups of reflection. But always the same question came up : how to build up hope in places where it is vanishing ?

An important point of reference for all those trying to come to grips with this question remains the commitment proposed to everyone last Easter. Not in the sense of a text to be studied, but rather a direction to take — and already many have taken it. For others, it still lies ahead, on the horizon...

To refresh our memories, here is the text of that "paschal commitment" :

Certain that a small number of women and men, spread across the face of the earth, striving to reconcile in themselves struggle and contemplation, can change the course of history and reinvent the world :

Because of the risen Christ, are you going to risk your life day after day, constantly setting out anew, never discouraged because loved with Eternity's love ?

Will you let yourself be consumed by the passion for a communion in Christ's wounded body ?

With the whole of God's people, will you open up paths of hope for all the human family ?

When each of us attempts to translate this commitment into our own life-situations, all at once it becomes very concrete. Some, who have already chosen a direction for their life, recognize their own strivings in the questions of the paschal commitment. For others, still trying to see their future more clearly, the questions point out a way of beginning to live a life in communion with Christ.

Toward the "second letter to the People of God"

The "first letter to the People of God" was written at Taizé for the opening of the Council of Youth two years ago. The second will be written in Calcutta.

Beginning in October, Brother Roger and an intercontinental group of young people will go to live in some of the poor neighborhoods of Calcutta, and in Mother Teresa's "Homes for the Dying". Brother Roger will also go to Bangla Desh, where some brothers of Taizé have been living for some time alongside people suffering extreme material poverty.

The journey will seek to give visible expression to some of the concerns of the Council of Youth : how can we live in solidarity with the poorest of the poor, especially those in the Southern hemisphere ? How can we let ourselves be questioned by their deepest aspirations ? How to show that we all belong to only one human family and that the gulfs growing between North and South are tearing it apart ? How can the People of God become a ferment of communion in the entire human community ?

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Those going to Asia will go with empty hands, not claiming to have the answers to the problems of today's world. Still, the journey corresponds to certain of the aspirations of many young people, such as those expressed by a young Indonesian :

"It is often so difficult to imagine just how much someone can find himself, find self-confidence, his gifts or capacities, through the simple fact of being listened to by others.

As an Asian I experience just how great is the myth of Western culture and technology in the eyes of so many of us. We can feel so small and have such a sense of cultural 'guilt' that we expect 'help' from people coming from a foreign culture. Many of the Westerners who come to help us come with the best motivations, but I cannot help wondering how much they're really helping, when, in their great eagerness, we are still considered, consciously or unconsciously, as being the weak. Does this not in fact tend to make the myth of the West even greater, and those who already feel weak become more conscious of their inferiority and limitations ?

Surely we need one another — we need to support one another, to welcome and be welcomed, to listen to one another. Both the attitudes of feeling small and wanting to help are deeply rooted within us. Only a meeting within the context of the 'universal family' can help us discover one another. Surely the journey to Calcutta and to Bangla Desh and the fact that the 'Second Letter to the People of God' will be written there are a sign pointing in this direction."

The journey will begin in Germany, with two meetings for young people held Friday, October 22 at 7:30 PM, in the "Stiftskirche" (church) of Tübingen, and Saturday,

October 23 at 7:30 PM, in the cathedral of Münster. Brother Roger will leave for Bombay the evening of October 24 from Frankfurt, joining some of the young people who will already have arrived in India.

Those looking for places to sleep in Tübingen or Münster will find information at the entrance to each of the churches.

The return will take place at Paris. The "second letter to the People of God" will be read at the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, Sunday afternoon December 5, during a service which will begin at 4 PM.

Those needing a place to stay in Paris can write to Taizé, and as soon as possible they will receive a reply from someone in Paris who is organizing the lodging.

The journey will give rise to a number of different ways of following up in various countries. For example, visits and weekends are being planned in many parts of Spain for the months from January to March, leading up to a meeting in Madrid at which Brother Roger will be present.

During the journey...

At Taizé, during the summer many small meetings were held to discuss the journey, especially with young people from Germany. One of the participants, summing up what was said, wrote :

"The trip's starting-point is the Federal Republic of Germany, a country with a high standard of living yet one which is poor in many human values. An atmosphere permeated with materialism leaves many prey to loneliness and despair, resignation and superficiality. The destination is India and Bangla Desh, two countries of economic

contradiction whose inhabitants live a rich human solidarity in the midst of poverty and are capable, despite their desolate living-conditions, of bringing to us a message of hope.

The gesture accomplished by Bother Roger and the group of young people will not remain an isolated event. The questions awakened by the unusual nature of the journey touch each of us in our own situation. It is like a call to each of us to set out on a 'journey' that perhaps will take us only a few hundred yards away from home in our own town or neighborhood : wherever people are in need of community, on the lookout for hope, suffering in and with the Church. No one knows the exact itinerary — life itself will show us the way.

Together, each in his or her own way, we are beginning this journey, and we ask : what kind of life-style must we try to create through struggle and contemplation, if we wish our lives to be based on sharing between the Southern and Northern hemispheres? How can I be a ferment of communion?"

While the journey to Asia is taking place, each of us can reflect upon how we can set out on the "journey" suggested above : leaving our "homes", visiting one another, discovering and entering places of hope not far from our own door and whose existence we are possibly unaware of, intensifiying our search for a local commitment.

Coming together in small groups for evenings or weekends of prayer will help us to go further. Before the Council of Youth celebration in Douala, those taking part split up into groups of ten and went into different parts of the city, choosing places where the Church was already showing signs of hope and freshness, and becoming a part

of the life in these places. Such modest gatherings — praying together, reflecting with others on the "paschal commitment" — will lead us to the discovery that many others share our own hope.

During these weekends, a simple prayer incorporating a significant amount of silence could be a time for setting before God the situation of the southern continents (including — among other places — India and Bangla Desh) together with the concerns of the locality in which each of us lives. In various cities in Britain and Ireland, for example, a weekly prayer is being organized by young people during the entire stay in India, along with attempts to contact different immigrant groups to learn something by becoming acquainted with their lives and customs. In New Zealand, gatherings are being planned between people of European and those of Polynesian origin. The next *Letter from Taizé* will contain a tentative form of prayer which could be used during such meetings.

To further support us in our searching, in many different countries a number of visits are being planned for the coming months. Anyone wishing to receive such visits or to take part in meetings organized in the course of the visits can always write to Taizé.

Additional news

— The last of the Council of Youth celebrations in Africa took place in Zaire, at Lubumbashi, from April 30 to May 2. The next *Letter from Taizé* and a forthcoming issue of *Communion* will have more to say about this.

— In September, the first of the Council of Youth celebrations in Asia took place during several weeks in Bangla Desh. In other Asian countries celebrations are in preparation and will be announced as early as possible.

— Brother Roger's new book, the continuation of hi journal, has just been published in French under the titl VIVRE L'INESPÉRÉ ("Living Beyond Every Hope"). A English version is already in preparation.

— Beginning in January, the LETTER FROM TAIZ will be completely transformed. In order to become better and more rapid means of communication, it wil appear each month, with a streamlined format and style

Dates to remember

Stiftskirche, Tübingen :	October 22, 7:30 PM
Cathedral, Münster :	October 23, 7:30 PM
Notre Dame, Paris :	December 5, 4:00 PM
Taizé :	Christmas-Epiphany
Madrid :	March 1977

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